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CELEBRATION

OF THE

SEMI-CENTENNIAL ANNIVERSARY OF THE FOUNDING OF THE OLD COLONY HISTORICAL SOCIETY OF MASSACHUSETTS.

COMMEMORATIVE ORATION

DELIVERED AT TAUNTON, MASSACHUSETTS,
MAY 4, 1903,

BY

JOHN ORDRONAUX

OF NEW YORK.

PUBLISHED BY THE OLD COLONY HISTORICAL SOCIETY,
TAUNTON, MASSACHUSETTS.
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Carnegie Institution
Washington, Office,
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ORATION.

My presence among you to-day is an event which justly awakens feelings of profound gratitude and astonishment; of gratitude, because of the length of days with continuing health granted me by our Almighty Father; and, next, of astonishment at the rare combination of circumstances which has assigned me so prominent a part in the exercises of the occasion.

This Golden Anniversary, so gratifying to you, is a day of startling reminiscences to me. All my fellow members who assembled in the study of Rev. Mr. Emery half a century ago to organize this Society, have gone to their final reward, and I, alone, spared by the will of a benevolent Creator, am present as their last survivor to participate in these festivities. Surely, no reflecting mind can fail to see the guiding hand of a superintending Providence in these mysteries of survivorship which cluster about longevity.

It is fifty years to-day since the General Court of Massachusetts granted to the Old Colony Historical Society a charter bestowing upon it an official life, with the right of perpetual succession. I was here at that time as a young lawyer recently admitted to the Bar, and a participant in the organization of this Society. Having thus witnessed its official

birth, and helped to rock its infant cradle, the permission now vouchsafed me to return after so long an interval, in order to witness its fiftieth anniversary, constitutes an epoch in my life of too unique a character not to awaken feelings of wonder, rising into bewilderment. To be thus called upon to mingle the present with the distant past; to revive and renew its miscellaneous associations long faded from view; to set back the clock of the century and reproduce the events of its past hours; to open the catacombs of memory and search its records with inquisitorial eyes—all these acts of reminiscent reproduction seem like the interjection of a feverish dream among the cold realities of a noisy, bustling, discordant world.

There are occasions in life which can never be anticipated or purposely constructed. They cannot be designed by any ingenuity of man, nor repeated at the command of his will. This is one of them; and, in the natural order of time, it is both a privilege and an opportunity which can come to us but once. Summoned by a sense of duty to appear here in order to answer your roll-call, and to rehearse the history of the origin and subsequent career of our Society, I stand as the representative of two distant periods, to each of which I can extend a hand. The first roll-call which I made as its Secretary was in May, 1853. Were I to repeat it to-day, no answering voice would be heard. Neither the call of duty nor the allurements of affection can bring back these departed colleagues.

Fifty years forms a large chapter in the life of any modern

literary society. Fifty years to look back upon and to review, not statistics alone, or tabulated collections of antiquities in your Hall, but much of this work occurring in the midst of, and included in the daily life of an active community like your own—quick to perceive, strong to undertake, zealous to accomplish—a hive of industry whose inhabitants are "Ever reaching to those things which are before!" Fifty years in which to count the graves of an extinguished generation of friends and fellow workmen, and to find myself the last laborer of them all, still able to raise my voice to do honor to their memory.

> "Can such things be,
> And overcome us like a summer's cloud
> Without our special wonder?"

To recall all these varying disconnected facts, brings before my eyes a tumultuous stream of names, persons and events that strikes my imagination now, like a tale woven in the loom of historical fiction. Explanations cannot, however, always explain the unexpected, unaccountable changes in men's circumstances. Unseen, yet ever present, is that sovereign "Divinity which shapes our ends" through the labor of our hands, yet independent of our will. For, after all that can be said about it, human life in its last analysis is but a succession of mysteries and miracles born from the womb of Time, each in its turn destined to be disclosed through its fulfilment of some fore-ordained divine purpose. All that we can be sure of in human destiny, is, that He who

holds the issues of life in the hollow of His hand never abdicates His sovereignty. 'Tis His to will and to do; 'tis ours to hear, submit and obey.

In answering, therefore, your very flattering invitation to act as your Orator in a review of this many-sided epic, I have felt that I was obeying a doubly imperative summons speaking to me through the voice of duty, and coming as if from the graves of the founders themselves. And since they are not here to prompt my memory or guide my pen in writing their annals, I trust that I shall not fall into the error of unrolling so large a canvas that my untrained brush may not be able to fill it.

Now and then, in the lives of institutions, as in those of men, there come occasions when it is proper to pause for self-examination; when it seems a duty to review past actions and to measure their results; when the fitting time has arrived to institute, as it were, a day of judgment—to summon parties, to hear witnesses, and to pronounce a verdict upon the facts as presented. This is the mission of History, whether recording the lives of institutions or of men, the differences between which are surface differences alone, the essentials not being widely dissimilar. Such an occasion is the present one. It marks a period of many busy, fruitful years since the founding of this Society, which now offers its life to the scrutiny of a public examination. If you ask me for its monument, it is here—partly in stone, partly in antiquarian contributions, which, under the name of transactions are designed to rescue

your early history from the engulfing waters of oblivion. To speak more specifically, that monument consists of public records, of private annals, of domestic antiquities, whether heirlooms, or other household treasures, of biographical sketches, of families, together with family portraits, their coats of arms and hatchments, the lingering relics of heraldic practice; of private letters, old newspapers, book accounts and such other floating miscellaneous papers as will stand for exhibits of either laws, customs or manners existing during the Colonial or Revolutionary period of American history. All these have been collected and stored in its Memorial Hall. This Museum of Antiquities, charged with the custody and safekeeping of these precious treasures, is the monument I offer you, as an ever-living witness to the fifty years labor of the sons and daughters of the Old Colony. Small in its architectural dimensions and already indicative of its growing incapacity to meet the demands of its increasing accumulations, it pleads with touching emphasis for enlargement. Amid all surrounding monuments of municipal progress here, whether dedicated to educational, commercial or literary purposes, the members of our Society may point to this humble treasure house of ancestral memories with feelings of true filial pride and congratulation. It is a flower of piety grown in the soil of material thrift, small in itself yet fragrant.

The past achievements of Taunton as a centre of industrial activity and of commercial energy were, in my day, second to those of no community occupying this colonial soil, and

the progress she had made in the development of the mechanic arts had justly placed her among the foremost cities of the old Bay State. Capital and industry had both combined to enlarge her home business and to expand the horizon of her external commerce. And although younger cities have sprung up about her, the hum of her industries is still everywhere heard in her streets, and, like the music of the reaper's scythe, proclaims the in-gathering of the generous daily harvest. In all these past years the smile of a superintending Providence has never been withheld from her citizens or their labors. Neither fire, flood or pestilence have ever desolated her homes. Her's is, indeed, a beautiful picture of the sunshine and prosperity which attends the steady conservative practice of the arts of peaceful industry. Measured by ordinary commercial standards of prosperity, such results are very gratifying to worldly ambition. They are also a spur to zeal and serve to maintain the momentum acquired by the arts thus successfully practiced. But material success alone should not be the sole object of municipal government, or the highest aim of individual effort. Man lives universally through his sentiments and affections before he does through his intellect. The great agitating storms of life, at either extreme of joy or sorrow, of hope or failure, of confidence or its breach, all take their rise in the one common center of our human emotions. It has always been true that "One touch of Nature makes the whole word kin." Our public parks and flower beds, our libraries, our music halls, our poetry and

the drama, all testify to the demands of a spiritual appetite for objects which cannot be taken in the hand; which cannot be weighed, measured or transferred by trade or barter.

Therefore, viewing all the wide avenues of prosperity with which Taunton abounds; the teeming industries which fill the air with ceaseless pulsations from forge, furnace and factory; the whirl of mill wheels and the ringing of anvils; viewing all these absorbing interests in the drama of her daily life as causes for congratulation, it is still more gratifying, in the light of this day's observances both to know, and to feel that neither the roaring of the loom, the singing of the shuttle, the clang of the hammer or the thunder of machinery, have silenced the voice of affection and reverence which still speaks in the lives of the descendants of the Pilgrims. It was not, therefore, the commerce or the mechanic arts of Taunton; not the loom, or the spindle; not the factory or the furnace, the cotton, the iron or the silver industry; it was not either of these, or all combined, that gave life and breath to the Old Colony Historical Society. It was none of these promoters of material prosperity that called it into being. Nay, if you ask for the motive which prompted its creation, the answer will be found in the Fifth Commandment: "Honor thy father and thy mother."

This Fifth Commandment, which stands forth so prominently in the moral code of all civilized nations, is no new canon of obligation, but forms part of the traditional religion and domestic usages of races whose antiquity antedates by

many centuries that of our own Christianity. It belongs to no age and to no particular people. The Chinese have practiced it as an article of faith from times remote enough to stand in the very dawn of history, and so intense is their reverence for this dogma of ancestor worship and the law of sacrilege which it embodies, that, in the recent Boxer rebellion, among the most flagrant crimes charged against the government was that of allowing foreigners to run railroads through native cemeteries and thus to desecrate their soil. The presence of this fifth commandment in the Tables of the Law was the re-affirmation of a Divine law already implanted in the human heart, and forming part of that universal conscience in which are to be found the roots of all moral conduct and positive jurisprudence. In its domestic aspects, it was intended as a tribute of filial gratitude to our parents when living, and to their memory when dead; and in its grander influences upon human society it has ever been a controlling force in the perpetuation of ancestral virtues and achievements.

Reverence and loyalty are due to every good family name and family character, and should form a part of the religion of all reflecting minds. When, therefore, the duty was assigned me as its first Secretary to construct its Seal, I made the legend upon it speak the baptismal vow with which the Society dedicated itself to the service of the memory of the Fathers. For, behind the glamor of its legislative charter; behind the thought which had engendered the idea of a

Historical Society for the Old Colony of Massachusetts; behind the faith which built its foundations in serene hope of a future which we to-day enjoy and glorify; behind all these underlying elements, spoke the still, small voice of loyalty—loyalty to ancestors, loyalty to the memory of Bradford and Brewster, Winthrop, Winslow, Prince and Standish, who had planted the first seeds of our national polity and national character.

The historian of a historical society has a double task to accomplish; first to describe scenes in which he has himself been an interested spectator, if not an actor, and next to portray occurrences, both personal and public, often involving unwritten customs and traditions, where the individual action is essentially submerged in the larger action of the community. His object, then, must be to present to posterity a panorama of events, sometimes connected, sometimes disparted, but preferably in their aggregate appearance and results. The spirit of the subject, rather than an itemized schedule of events should constitute the animating motive of his work, the minor details of which may not deserve special mention at every stage of his narrative. This is particularly the case with the history of a literary institution whose life is best reflected in the records of its administration. We cannot, however, escape the presence of the personal element in corporate action, since it represents in varying degrees the external character of men, their industry, their fluctuating endeavors, their purposes, their hopes, the obstacles encountered by

them, and the success achieved. The annals of our Society include portions of contemporary, as well as of colonial and revolutionary history. We have not been dealing with legends, ballads, or old-wives' stories, but with substantive facts remembered by living witnesses, or recorded in accessible documents.

It is common to speak, without exception, of any corporation as a soulless body by reason of the legal metaphor embodied in its definition, "an artificial person, invisible, intangible, and existing only in contemplation of law." But ours was never such from its very inception. It has always had a soul, and that soul is loyalty to the Fifth Commandment. The men who founded it represented in their action obedience to the spirit and the letter of this Divine Law. The motives which prompted them, and the spirit which has ever directed its course have all been soul-born and spiritual, instead of being material, motives. No breath of worldly desire; no stain of ambition for local fame, power or secular gain, ever entered as a moving consideration into its foundation. Throughout their labors, the personal equation of zeal, energy and loving enthusiasm always carried the plus sign before it. Outside also of this field, their sense of duty was broad and comprehensive. It was alive to all public wants, whose demands were an ever-standing call for action. Therefore, was it that their affections were not confined alone to the narrow sphere of a historical society having but a limited field of activity, as a noiseless collector of antiquities. Far from it.

Their good citizenship embraced a wider territory at the Bar, in the Church, on the Bench, and carried with it more miscellaneous and more responsible duties. To you who lived in close touch and daily relations with them—while I, as a fifty-year absentee can only speak from hearsay and tradition—to you, it is well known that the honored names of Morton, Daggett, Reed and Emery, will occupy a larger space in the municipal history of Taunton, even than they do in that of our Society. Nor should we omit from this galaxy of our worthies the name of John D. W. Hall, who, if not himself, among the founders, yet, as the Editor of a local journal, gave us, from the very first, the hearty support of his paper, and, later on, when filling the office of Secretary, devoted with an irrepressible ardor the declining years of a long life to the services of the Society.

In rehearsing the annals of our association from its inception, I am dealing with both original and reflective history. The former enables me to relate events which passed before my eyes, and in which I took part. Unfortunately, the time occupied by this period was too short to enable me, at this day, to do more than give you from personal knowledge what is only the preface to the fifty years of life we are now celebrating. My removal from Taunton in July, 1854, only one year after the Society's incorporation, breaks, of necessity, the continuity of this personal knowledge, and I am left in the position of a late gatherer of such disconnected facts, records and public events as have been kindly furnished me

by your Secretary. Without his generous aid, I should have been unwilling to accept the responsibilities of this hour, and equally unable to meet its exacting demands for historical accuracy. I owe it, therefore, to Mr. Seaver, as well as to myself, to make this public statement, in order that merit may be acknowledged where merit is deserved. Had I remained a member of your community and in close touch with your contemporary history in its varied relations to this Old Colony Society, my equipment as your Historian would have reached much nearer to what you had a right to expect. But all this was prevented by my removal. Moreover, the dry statistical facts of reflective history, however carefully collated or presented to an audience, cannot be expected to enchain their attention, or to impart sentiment to an occasion dedicated to rejoicing and congratulations. To be interesting, such facts should be picturesque. They should represent living efforts moved by human affections and be a picture of the kaleidoscope of social life. They should bespeak the movements of the heart, the mind and the hand—the energy of warm blood and the ardor of temperament. These are the constructive forces of life in action, and, when directed by an uplifting purpose, are the things which impart nobility to the labors of men. In our descriptions of them there may be coloring and there may be philosophy, but there need not be conjecture alone, for truth does not allow us to draw upon our imagination. The despotism of a fact wherever met, must be acknowledged and accorded its due influence.

We cannot, however, at will separate biography from history in the lives of institutions, any more than in those of men. It will always remain true that "All the world 's a stage," and life, whether local or national, whether in a public arena or a private home, only parts of a universal drama. The theatres and court-rooms we visit, and the romances we pore over in print, afford us no scenes or incidents more stirring to heart and mind than those we daily move among as witnesses or actors. In raising, therefore, the curtain of our Society's chronology, I must first introduce an element of biography which justice, friendship and reverence for the memory of its founders alike combine to demand. And, where all are equally meritorious, it is difficult to discriminate by exclusion. Yet, there was one conspicuous leader whose name, like Abou Ben Ahdem's, in the poet's vision, "led all the rest." It is the name of

NATHANIEL MORTON

and to his memory we owe the homage of our gratitude for the foundation of the Old Colony Historical Society. To him exclusively, belongs the merit of having foreseen the expediency of this local association and its future usefulness, as a conservator of historical antiquities still ungathered.

It was a bold move to make under the shadow and within the jurisdiction of the Massachusetts Historical Society, the parent of all similar associations in the Commonwealth; a

society then already 60 years old, well intrenched in the esteem of the people, and possessed of a library and rich stores of colonial history and antiquities. It had claimed the attention and received the assistance of the scholars, statesmen and divines of the Commonwealth. A long series of publications bore witness to the regularity of its meetings and the efficiency of its work, as shown in the character of those official transactions. Every new item of local history seemed, or was expected, to drift by some underlying and mysterious current of attraction toward its shelves, and to require to be passed under its scrutiny before receiving a certificate of authenticity. Like our national currency, its papers passed everywhere without discount. Its lynx-eyed officers were quick to prick the bubbles of historical conceit, and to explore the errors of apprentices in archæology. It could safely be said that if you found any item of Massachusetts history vouched for by that Society, the record of its truth was closed, and no appeal from it could be taken. And there were, also, at that time other antiquarian societies in existence, such as the American Antiquarian Society of Worcester, incorporated in 1812; the Pilgrim Society of Plymouth in 1820, the New England Historical and Genealogical Society in 1845, and the Essex Institute in 1848, but of these the Pilgrim Society was the only historical one within the limits of the Old Colony.

It is needless to say that all the foregoing Societies were ever on the alert for fresh acquisitions of materials

to add to their treasures, and not likely to have refused their acceptance from whatever portion of the Commonwealth they might have come. I dwell upon these facts to show the boldness of the undertaking embraced in the foundation of our Society by Mr. Morton, and the loyal determination to leave no portion of the Old Colony unsearched for relics of the days and labors of your ancestors. How well this good office has been discharged during the past fifty years, I leave to the treasures contained in your Hall, and your transactions to prove. They speak of labors performed by prying eyes in out-of-the-way places; of garrets ransacked, store-rooms overhauled; of ancient, weather-stained letters and other papers rescued from the enveloping dust of scores of years. All these constitute historical exhibits of an uncontradictable character, and may safely be trusted as guides in forming your verdict.

I have said that we owe to the memory of Nathaniel Morton the homage of our gratitude as the founder of this Society. Nothing less will justify historical truth or vindicate my right to appear as its exponent. And the Brief which I hold to-day in behalf of this Society, while including him as one of its important points, calls for its treatment on a basis of friendship and personal regard, no less than on that of truth and historical accuracy. I cannot forget that for nearly two years I occupied very close relations to him, both as a student and member of his family, and, although over forty years have elapsed since his death, this is the first

opportunity ever given me of paying a public tribute to his memory. However late this may appear, I am happy to be able to bring my little measure of cotton and oil to feed this lamp of remembrance. He was a lawyer of superior talents, with the most brilliant prospects which a distinguished ancestry, influential connections and a successful professional practice could open before him. But, dying in mid-career, at the early age of 34, his sun set while it was yet day, and his way was barred to that professional eminence which he seemed so conspicuously destined to reach. That which was accorded to his distinguished father, as Governor of the Commonwealth, and to his eminent brother, as its Chief Justice, never came to him. Unfortunately, the "dry light of Jurisprudence" did not present such allurements to his mind, as to kindle in it the fervor of a consecrated worshipper. His successes cost him little effort, or even preparation. It seemed that his talents secured him such easy victories at the Bar that he never felt the necessity of pressing them to their full capacity. Had he lived longer, age and rivalry would have broadened his view of that necessity.

Whether the idea of founding this Society originated with Mr. Morton, or was the product of another mind, cannot now be known, but he, at least, was the first to present a plan for it in a concrete form. I had never heard of the project until he broached the subject to me. This was in the autumn of 1852, soon after my arrival in Taunton. At that time his father-in-law, Mr. Francis Baylies, author of a Historical Memoir of the Colony of New Plymouth, was still living. As a

ripe scholar and historian, his interest in American history did not confine itself to the Old Colony alone, for he had planned a work of extensive proportions to embrace the administrations of Washington, Adams, Jefferson and Madison. Skeleton outlines of these several works had already been drafted, and, after his death, were submitted to me for examination. It is chiefly, however, as the historian of the Plymouth Colony that Mr. Baylies will be remembered, and it is a reasonable presumption, in view of his wide knowledge of local history, that he was consulted, together with Gov. Morton, Mr. William Baylies, Mr. Edmund Baylies, and members of the clergy and Bristol County Bar who were personal friends of Mr. Morton. I was present at most of these preliminary meetings, but, being in their nature informal, kept no record of them. The project grew rapidly, under the increasing conviction that such a Society had before it a field of antiquarian research, which had not yet been exhausted.

At that day, the phrase, "Old Colony," when intended to describe a geographical territory, was popularly used as a term of familiar application to the fringe of towns bordering upon Massachusetts Bay, or to the Counties of Plymouth and Barnstable, because representing the soil first trodden by the Pilgrim Fathers. As a matter of history and civil government, this was plainly an error, but names of places when popularly interpreted do not always indicate their claims to authenticity, and their continued use more often depends upon some accident of adhesiveness, than upon geographical

accuracy. The earliest use of the term which I can find was made by an association of Plymouth citizens who organized themselves under the title of the Old Colony Club, in 1769 and which was dissolved in 1773. In like manner, a newspaper called the Old Colony Reporter was established in 1821, and the Old Colony Bank of the same place was chartered in 1832. With the single exception of the Old Colony Iron Works, of Taunton, established about the year 1850, the prefix "Old Colony" does not appear, outside of Plymouth County, to have been attached to any corporation until 1844, when the Old Colony Railroad was chartered as a corporation operating a road between Plymouth and Boston, and which was followed by our own incorporation in 1853. This further fixed the name as one of geographical limitation to the counties of Plymouth and Bristol, and by continued use has now become generally adopted and intrenched in the popular memory. Mr. Morton, Mr. Ellis Ames and Judge Daggett, being careful lawyers and painstaking antiquarians, when a name for our Society was under discussion, had these facts before them, and took the broad ground that ours was not a misnomer, but that we always formed a portion of the Old Colony and had been so recognized from the first in the early history of Gov. Bradford (2). Their views being heartily endorsed by their associates, we were incorporated as the only Historical Society under our present title.

Acting upon these grounds, when the Society instructed me, as its first Secretary, to construct an appropriate seal, I

(1) Works of Daniel Webster, Vol. 1, p. 3.
(2) Bradford's History, p. 44.

placed in its centre, and as its leading feature, Plymouth Rock with the date 1620, and the legend, "Lux prima occidentis," over a sunburst. This was an acknowledgement of Plymouth's precedence in receiving the earliest light of civil and religious liberty in the Colony, and outside of this, I inscribed our own baptismal vow of "Patrum memorium custodire," with a border, containing the official name of our Society. Such is the glyptic interpretation of our Seal with the underlying motive of its construction.

This completed our legal equipment of a charter and a seal, but, although our act of incorporation was of the date of May 4, 1853, no formal organization occurred until the 23d of February, 1854, when, at a meeting held at the study of Rev. Mr. Emery, its first Board of officers was elected, consisting of the following persons:

President, NATHANIEL MORTON, ESQ., Taunton.

Vice Presidents: REV. SAMUEL H. EMERY, Taunton.
HON. JOHN DAGGETT, Attleboro.

Directors: REV. MORTIMER BLAKE, Mansfield.
HON. SAMUEL L. CROCKER, Taunton.
ELLIS AMES, ESQ., Canton.
HENRY B. WHEELWRIGHT ESQ., Taunton.
WILLIAM R. DEANE, ESQ., Boston.
CALEB SWAN, M. D., Easton.

Recording Secretary and Librarian: EDGAR H. REED, Taunton.

Corresponding Secretary: JOHN ORDRONAUX, Taunton.

Treasurer: HODGES REED, ESQ., Taunton.

The next step to be taken by the Society related to the acquisition of a suitable home for its future collections. Mr. Morton had had this object under consideration from the very beginning, and, soon after our incorporation, informed me that he had purchased the Old Taunton Bank building, corner of Cedar street, with the intention of having it passed over to the Society. Meanwhile, a subscription list had been opened representing its capital, which had then been fixed at $5,000, divided into $1,000 shares of $5.00 each, and the public were invited by suitable circulars to become stockholders. A committee of 10 was also appointed to solicit subscriptions. In response to this invitation, the records show that 252 shares only were sold, aggregating $1,260. As the Old Bank building, according to the consideration mentioned in the deed of conveyance, had cost Mr. Morton $3,750, the amount of the capital then subscribed was inadequate for its purchase, and the premises remained in the hands of Mr. Morton until his death.

From 1854 to 1885, the Society being without a fixed habitation, held its meetings at various places, according as circumstances favored special localities. Its active membership was then small, and its meetings without particular significance. Under the law of organic growth, it had not yet reached the plane of a working capacity. Time enough had not elapsed to make itself felt as a working force. Yet during all these years, there was a growing feeling of the importance of collecting historical treasures of a perishable nature,

stored in out-of-the-way places, and daily exposed to the risks of conflagration or other destructive agencies. This feeling finally assumed a concrete form of action on the occasion of the celebration of the 250th anniversary of the settlement and incorporation of Taunton, when, at a meeting of the Society held on July 20, 1885, Rev. Dr. Emery introduced the following resolution :

"Whereas, the Old Colony Historical Society has had an honorable existence as an incorporated body for more than thirty years and deserves well in its high aims and purposes of the Old Colony,

"Therefore, Resolved : That it is a fitting time as we propose celebrating the birthday of these early towns, to revive the attempt begun in 1854, but never consummated, to provide a permanent building for historical purposes and a suitable place of deposit for books and valuable papers and documents connected with the early history of the Old Colony."

A committee was appointed to act and report upon this resolution. As a result of the success of their labors, in the ensuing year, at a meeting held October 11, 1886, the President announced that three-fourths of the purchase money necessary to secure the Cedar street chapel had been raised, and urged the continuance of the work of collecting funds. This was speedily accomplished, and on September 25, 1886, the Society finally came into possession of its permanent home through a deed of conveyance executed by Mr. Joseph

Dean, its previous owner, reciting among its covenants that:

"The purpose of the grantee in taking this deed free from all conditions, restrictions or limitations, and absolutely in fee, is to devote the property forever to those uses for which the Old Colony Historical Society was incorporated." (*)

In the interval occurring between 1854 and 1886, there had been occasional meetings of the Society, and generally at different places. One, in particular, deserves mention because celebrating its 25th anniversary. It was held in the Common Council room, April 30, 1878; Rev. Henry M. Dexter offered prayer; President Daggett made some remarks, and Rev. Dr. Emery read a sketch of the origin and progress of the Association during its first 25 years, and Rev. Dr. Tarbox, of Boston, presented a paper on the differences between the Pilgrims and Puritans. Following this, there came a long season of remarkable inactivity, for which no explanation can now be given. From 1860, until 1885, no extended records of meetings of the Society appear to have been kept; dates alone of their occurrence are the sole exhibits I can find. This lethargy was doubtless occasioned by the want of a home and rallying centre around which to gather those historical treasures which have since multiplied so rapidly, and have imparted to the Society so living a character, with such large prospects of usefulness. Meanwhile a taste for antiquarian research, and a zest in gratifying it had

(3) There were 84 contributors to this purchase, of which Mr. Dean was himself the leading and largest.

begun to exhibit itself. This initiative and its results can best be illustrated by a few statistics.

Its membership on starting was 250. It now represents 644, of which 259 are life, 276 resident, 103 corresponding, and 26 honorary. The capital allowed by the original charter was $15,000. In 1887 the charter was amended by extending the limit of its capital to $50,000. No right estimate of the present value of its property can be made, outside of its hall and library, estimated to be worth about $9,650, because its most valuable property consists of things which, being in their very nature irreplaceable, are consequently priceless.

Since the acquisition of a Memorial Hall, its strides in popularity have been rapid and extensive. It would seem as if the public, though tardy in recognizing the important duty it was performing as a local historian, was seeking to make amends for past omissions of interest. As proof of this may be cited the fact that 123 family portraits now grace its walls; 400 volumes of historical memoirs of towns and persons, together with school reports, are on its shelves; also hundreds of pamphlets; 201 volumes of newspapers beginning with the first one printed here in 1820, and quantities of relics whose miscellaneous character forbids any particular enumeration. What it most seriously needs now is a fireproof building in which to preserve and exhibit such articles as cannot safely be exposed in its Hall, together with its own records. Every year makes the demand for such protection more and more imperative.

From a summary schedule of records furnished me by your Secretary, Mr. Seaver, it appears that from 1854 to 1868 meetings of the Society were held with apparent regularity, sometimes only for the election of officers and generally with little or no business to transact. From June 6, 1868, to February 23, 1878, a period of nearly eleven years, no meetings at all were held. The Society seems to have fallen into a state of suspended animation. Why this should have occurred, there appears no good reason to show. It happened as events in life will sometimes, without any inculpating circumstances lying at anyone's door. The Society was adrift. It was still without a home. Judge Daggett had been its president since the death of Mr. Morton in 1856, and so continued until 1886, a period of thirty years, but his advanced age and declining health had long disabled him from taking any active part in its movements, and it slumbered in consequence. Upon his death, Rev. Samuel H. Emery was elected President, remaining so until his own decease in 1902. Thereupon, a regenerative process seems to have begun its good work. This subsequent period of 16 years marks a most gratifying regeneration of all the affairs of the Society, together with great accessions to its antiquarian treasures. Bequests began to flow in, and donations, in addition to those already received for the purchase of its Hall, were made to the amount of $3,000. There have also been manifestations of rapidly increasing public interest in the

welfare of the Society; contributions of historical papers have been read at its meetings; it has issued five volumes of transactions, and a sixth is in process of publication. This marks the golden age of its past history, and merits something more than a passing notice. For, if success be the parent of success, we have here great promises for the future of a Society which already stands on a footing of parity with any similar association in the Commonwealth. But that success was not accidental. It had a living force behind it.

In one of those crisp apothegms of Emerson, unfolding the secret of a great moral truth, he tells us that an institution is often but the lengthened shadow of one man. History has many illustrations of this truth, which operates alike in small bodies as in great; nor need we go far to find an instance. If there be in our Society's history any one man whose lengthened shadow was long a moving spiritual force in its life work, that man was Samuel Hopkins Emery. He was among its founders, and stood next to Morton in the chronology of its origin. But even as Elder Brewster, though next to Bradford in the Plymouth Colony, was in fact the moving spiritual force of that community, so Emery acted a corresponding part in our Society. And, as Morton died soon after its foundation, and Daggett was physically incapacitated for nursing and developing an institution requiring residence among, and deep roots in the affection of a community, it was providentially left to his successor to be our Moses and regenerator. Who that ever knew him, and

followed his labors in behalf of this Society, will venture to believe that without him we could have said this day to the world, Come, examine us, and see what has been done through the leadership of this faithful steward of our historical vineyard. No talent of his was ever buried in a napkin, or left at rest. His enthusiasm was without abatement in any labor which he undertook, and his quickened pulse imparted electrical energy to everything he touched. Possessed of a fervid temperament, his warmth of heart and zeal were an inspiring force to all around, for he was one of those devoted servants of the Lord who firmly believe that he who plougheth, should plough in hope. And thus it was that, to the very last, he carried throughout his life-work an atmosphere of glowing ardor that shone in his countenance like the golden sunset of a tropical sky.

It is a somewhat singular fact that the first years of our Society were years of great activity. Dr. Emery, in his historical sketch, at the celebration of its 25th anniversary on April 30, 1878, remarks that

"With such industry did the Old Colony Historical Society work, the first fifteen years of its existence, from 1853 to 1868, that it seems to have settled down into a state of inaction from sheer exhaustion, but there are symptoms of a new awakening of this somewhat ancient Society at the present time."

It would be difficult, if not impossible, at this late day to assign any satisfactory reasons for this sudden drop in the

progress of the Society, unless we borrow a figure from mathematics and say that the height of a pyramid should always accompany the breadth of its base, and, in consequence, that our height then reached was all that our base could sustain, or, in a more popular view, it might be the effect of that sudden exhaustion which often overtakes enterprises started at too rapid a pace. Whatever, then, may have been its cause, for which I can find no more logical syllogism than this, it is a fact that somewhere along in the Eighties the Society began broadening its base, and its elevation followed in a corresponding ratio. This should stand as a useful lesson to us Americans, who feel that our superior activity could have built Rome or the Pyramids in a day, and have swung St. Peter's mighty dome into place like the lid of an iron pot, at the single toss of a steam derrick. But historical societies are not architectural problems. They have deeper and wider-spreading roots, and their growth must draw its sap from the affections and living interests of the community in which they have their home. Dr. Emery's lengthened shadow seems to have been the animating force which wtought the new awakening of the Society's activities.

Somewhere about the year 1886 occurs the dawn of this new dispensation, with Dr. Emery, Judge Bennett and Charles A. Reed on deck, or at the helm, to be followed by Messrs. Brayton, Lovering, Crapo, Porter and Judge Fuller and the veterans, Edgar Reed and John W. D. Hall. Now it was that with this inviting Memorial Hall and a broadly

scattered membership, an antiquarian harvest of relics began rapidly flowing in. Contributions came from far and near. And let the truth be known that this harvest of historical treasures which adorns your walls, or loads your shelves, comes not alone from male members. In the list of busy gleaners the sisterhood stands high. The daughters of the Old Colony have been side by side with her sons in filial loyalty. For every Boaz, there has been a Ruth; for every Aquila, there has been a Priscilla; for every Timothy and Titus, there has been a Phœbe and a Triphœna. Industrious hands like those of whom the Scriptures make honorable mention, because of the practice of household virtues, have toiled with ardor in gathering heirlooms, and these ancestral crumbs have been more precious and more priceless than many of those accessions upon which the impress of a national greenback currency has been stamped.

Among these treasures of the past, whose numbers already exceed our architectural capacity to contain them, one has come to us of so weird a character as to elicit unusual wonder. Hoary with age, with undeciphered inscriptions awaiting, like another Rosetta stone, its own particular interpreter, the Dighton Writing Rock continues to be a marvel to antiquarian scholars. Had Columbus or Americus Vespuccius touched it with their feet, we should have felt that they had impressed upon it a character almost sacred. But, older than Plymouth Rock, older even than Columbus, older, in fact, than modern history, it stands unique in solitary and unap-

proachable grandeur. The true meaning of its inscription being still a matter of litigation among archæologists, I cannot undertake to express an opinion upon the merits of its claims as an alleged Scandinavian monument. But, whether that inscription be runic, or of later Indian origin, it marks at least an important event in the history of the ancient Vinland, the Goode. And having now become part of our acquisitions, it belongs to our history, whether obtained by gift, purchase or devise; nor can we, in good conscience, venture to impeach the international reputation of that relic by casting doubts upon its title. If our antiquities were restricted to the period alone of English colonization of this continent, the Dighton Rock would represent nothing of value to us. But I know of no hard-and-fast rule by which we are debarred the privilege of collecting any relics of the past residence or labors of any ante-Columbian occupants of the soil of the Old Colony. An abstract of the title to this Rock shows that in 1857 it was purchased by Mr. Niels Arnzen, of Fall River, from Mr. Thomas F. Dean, of Berkeley, on whose land it lay, for the sum of $50. In that transaction, it seems Mr. Arnzen was acting as a Trustee for Mr. Ole Bull, the celebrated violinist, who, not being an American citizen, could hold no title in real estate. After Mr. Bull's death, he not having completed the purchase, Mr. Arnzen, himself a Scandinavian, made a gift of the property to the Royal Society of Northern Antiquarians of Copenhagen, in 1860, who accepted it as a genuine monument of

the visit of Scandinavian navigators to this continent about the year 1008. A proposition to remove the Rock to Copenhagen having failed of accomplishment, the Society presented it to the Old Colony Historical Society, by a deed of quit-claim dated January 30, 1889. And here it is destined to remain as our last surviving relic, "amid the wrecks of matter and the crush of worlds."

In this hasty and summary review of the fifty years labors of the Old Colony Historical Society, there is continuing reason for congratulation and still more for hope. History, said Mr. Webster in one of his public addresses, is God's providence in the affairs of men. Wherever we examine a group of facts, or periods of time, or combinations of events of inexplicable connection, we find this to be true. On every side it is made plain that we cannot sever ourselves from the Divine government, nor step outside of its jurisdiction. The father of modern philosophy, in writing upon Fortune, holds up to view the strong faith in which the great minds of antiquity, without even the light of revelation to guide them, rested in that belief. That which they called Fortune, we call Providence, a power which makes for righteousness with grace abounding.

The history of some portions of the Old Colony has not yet been exhausted by writers. The larger dramas of the colonial period, such as Indian wars, religious dissensions, the establishment of State and Town governments, their boundaries and conflicting claims, the support of a state religion

by local taxation, and church membership as a qualification for citizenship, all these ancient questions which formerly disturbed the peace of good men's minds have disappeared before the light of a broader conception of Christian fellowship and of civil liberty. Although much has, in these larger directions of historical inquiry, been chronicled by early annalists, and more still has been sketched by later ones anxious to leave no field unswept, there are chapters of domestic life yet slumbering in undiscovered relics that deserve to be rescued from the destructive agencies of time, weather and accident. Crumbs are being still gathered whose value at times surprises us. Let the threshings continue; let the gleaners keep up their work. Old farm houses—attics—store-rooms—closets—trunks, and wherever else collections of family papers have been made, should be diligently searched. Many a curious, and many a valuable discovery has been made in this way of useful historical material. Prof. Thorold Rogers' monumental work, entitled "Six Centuries of Labor and Wages in England" was compiled largely from searches made among old farm registers, stewards' accounts, family expense books, bills and receipts, and other similar waste-basket materials.

Portions of Gov. Bradford's Letter Book, which, like his "History of Plymouth Plantations," was lost to view for many years, were accidentally discovered among waste papers in a grocery store in Nova Scotia, and subsequently published in the Massachusetts Historical Collections. Almost every

chapter of human history has some lost pages in it, for which we should search. Sooner or later these lost jewels may be found and the gap be filled. Time and patience are the great agencies of success in historical researches.

It is true that the public are not generally interested in antiquarian pursuits. They prefer to follow the movements forward of society, rather than to trace them in retrospect. The former are more picturesque, because they present a moving panorama of actual life, with its varied colors and vicissitudes. The past, consequently, has few attractions to those who wish to be in close touch with present events, and to feel their presence in the very air they breathe. But the function of a Historical Society is not to amuse itself, and be entertained with present events, so much as it is to gather and store those that have contributed to the movement of the past; to preserve events that have marked advancement and progress; events that constitute a link in the chain of cause and effect, and tend to illustrate God's purposes in the destiny of mankind. In other words, a historical society should be a court of historical justice, whose duty it is made to decide upon the legitimacy of claims for recognition in the annals of a country.

The Old Colony has been fortunate in the possession of founders whose merits have been too often rehearsed in private and official chronicles to require any repetition on this occasion. They were men and women of strength and purpose: their lives had been disciplined in the school of high

endeavor, and they were acquainted with the vicissitudes which attend upon expatriation, upon political persecution and religious disfranchisement. In England, a dissenter from the Established Church was, in their day, regarded as the social and political inferior of a high churchman. This formed a barrier to social intimacy and influence. But although Dissenters and Separatists from the Ecclesiastical Establishment, they did not discard the principles of the English Common Law, which they had brought with them, for they began laying the foundations of our civil polity by establishing the Town as the political unit of popular government, and, in accordance with those principles, gave it a parochial character with sovereign power in the Church, as the nursery of citizenship and of civil liberty. Reduced to their simplest expression, these foundations rested upon the Bible, the common school and equality of all men before the law.

In his address at the laying of the cornerstone of Bunker Hill Monument, Mr. Webster could pronounce no higher eulogium upon their virtues than by placing their religious character in the foreground of his praise. Allow me to quote his words:

"The character," said he, "of our countrymen, moreover, was sober, moral and religious, * * * . We had no domestic throne to overturn, no privileged orders to cast down, no violent changes of property to encounter. In the American Revolution no man sought or wished for more than to defend

and enjoy his own. None hoped for plunder or spoil. * * * And we all know it could not have lived a single day under any well founded imputation of possessing a tendency adverse to the Christian religion."

These were the men and women who founded the families of which you are the descendants, and they have left names whose memory you have here pledged yourselves to preserve.

But, in common with other portions of New England, the Old Colony has suffered from the disappearance of old county families whose names were formerly familiar in the Town Meeting, in the Church, at the Bar, and on the Bench. These were representative American families who formed and guided the public opinion of their communities, and gave it an almost statutory power in the government of civil affairs. Our colonial governments constituted an agricultural democracy, and our leading families had their homes in the country. These homes were often birthplaces of successive generations. They had witnessed the beginnings of married life and the funerals of parents and grandparents. They were shrines consecrated by the memory of the most important events in family life, and were endeared by ties that neither time, accident or changes of circumstance could alter. Cities had not yet risen to such prosperity with commercial allurements, as to win families away from their ancestral acres. The country home still remained the impregnable fortress of family affection and contentment. But, in a world of changes and chances, men, families, states—all must take

their turn. The unexpected of yesterday becomes the actual of to-day, and sadder than all changes has been the weakening of the original American spirit which for nearly two centuries had pervaded home life—had directed Church authority and discipline, and had so animated civil government itself that even courts took cognizance of it in construing the limits of public policy as applied to the police powers of the state. Call that American spirit, as you please, whether Puritan, Colonial, or Provincial, it is still the only true commonwealth and ethical spirit, on which a democratic Christian republic can be permanently established. It has been successfully tested in domestic peace and in civil war, in federal organization and in federal reconstruction, and has withstood every strain put upon it. In public estimation, it embodies the entire genius of our form of Government, whether in structure or administration. This American spirit, combining religion with local autonomy as the basis of civil liberty, was the cornerstone of our Commonwealth system. (1) It was born and nursed in the country homes of the original colonies, but attained its most salient form in the Puritan Commonwealth of Massachusetts.

The men who formed the original pillars of our republican government were, for the most part, farmers whose families had had their roots in the soil of our colonies for several generations. They were full of the American spirit of independence, with names well known in public affairs. The Church council and the town meeting were the schools for

(1) Frothingham's "Rise of the Republic of the U. S.," p. 22.

their political education, where the chair of the Moderator and of leading Committees was usually filled from their ranks. The strength and authority of these country families has been everywhere destroyed by their removal to cities. In so doing, their identity became merged in that of the miscellaneous crowd. Cities, in fact, are the graveyards of family names and traditions, where their descendants become too often indifferent to the value of their political heritage and allow themselves to drop into indolence and insignificance. Yet, experience shows that the power of a great name need not soon expire. It may be kept strong to conjure with in successive generations, if descendants will only continue to transmit an unsullied character. There is a family in this state, now in its fifth generation, whose voice always commands attention and respect when dealing with subjects of public interest; nor is it here alone, for its reverberations come back to us from other parts of the country, carrying with them similar evidences of continuing veneration.

A good lineage everywhere carries with it the duty of reverence and perpetuation. Respect for a strong character is universal. Mankind, without distinction of tribe, nation or creed, have ever felt an interior, uplifting force, in the consciousness of being well-born. Statues, obelisks and marble sepulchres testify to this veneration for ancestor-memory. Looking at its universality, it approaches almost to an intuition which religion develops into a duty. All men, as well as all nations, need to have ideals—ideals of virtue, of

honor, of truth, of honesty—and a reasonable family pride is one of those conservative forces in human society which deserves to be respected and cultivated. It is capable of acting both as a stimulus to patience and perseverance in good works, and as a deterrent from evil, in moments of temptation. It establishes ideals of honorable conduct and generous dealing which serve as barriers to greed and commercial rapacity. Fools may distort family pride into self conceit and vanity, as they may distort religion into idolatry, divine worship into jugglery, or solemn ceremonials into mere harlequin performances. They may distort, but they cannot destroy it. Its roots are implanted in the human heart as the spiritual complement to the Fifth Commandment.

President John Adams, while dwelling on the subject of family pride in one of his letters to his wife, uses these notable words:

"The virtues and talents of ancestors should be considered as examples and solemn trusts, and produce meekness modesty and humility, lest they should not be imitated and equalled. Mortification and humiliation can only be the legitimate feelings of a mind conscious that it falls short of its ancestors in merit." (1)

And, in an earlier letter to Hannah Adams, he discloses his own personal feelings more trenchantly by saying:

"If I could ever suppose that family pride were anywhere excusable, I should think a descent from a line of virtuous independent New England farmers for one hundred and sixty

(1) Works of John Adams, Vol. 1, 464.

years a better foundation for it, than a descent through royal or noble scoundrels ever since the flood." (2)

The same reasons which were felt to justify this Revolutionary patriarch and uncompromising democrat in his acceptance of family pride as a tribute to ancestry, justifies it in all the living descendants of the early New England colonists. They were your ancestors, as well as his own. The same fountain furnished both streams. Nor should this feeling be limited to New England alone. In all the original Thirteen States there must still be remnants of old representative families slowly passing into oblivion. We cannot afford to part with names that stand on our Declaration of Independence or among the framers of our Constitution or on our Revolutionary Rosters. Those names were borne by men who were the architects of our political fabric and who built its enduring walls. Therefore, it should be the duty and purpose of all Historical Societies to resuscitate these decaying names by doing what the Old Colony Historical Society has been aiming at, in preserving the memory of the Fathers. Let these fading patronymics be brought to the front and let their descendants be stimulated to emulate their spirit and their virtues. Our times sadly need a revival of Puritan simplicity and earnestness in the household. Since now, more than ever, it is cause for very solemn reflection, to see prosperity bringing in its train a moral indifference to things formerly held sacred; to see a falling off in respect for the old family Bible and the

(2) Works of John Adams, Vol. 9, 675.

practice of family worship; for the old American Sabbath; for the "Old Homestead" with its local, immutable associations, and for the purity and dignity of public office. These are national heirlooms deserving preservation. I repeat that there is reason for very serious anxiety in seeing all these sacred traditions undergoing disruption. They entered into the genius of American civil liberty and sustained its spirit. Moreover, they especially embodied the inherited Puritanism to which we owe not alone the foundations of the Republic, but the power given by its spirit to the conduct of our Revolution, without which, in the words just quoted from Daniel Webster, that Revolution would not have lived a single day. Yet, these are the national ideals which Americans of to-day are willing to stand by and see diluted, and washed out by the tide of miscellaneous immigration, and the tawdry imitation of foreign nobility in the customs of the most favored circles of our own people. Surely, American citizenship shows need already of much repairing, and these repairs should begin in the family, the initial political unit of the State.

Let it never be forgotten that the firesides of the Old Colony were the original nurseries of piety, sobriety and loyalty in New England. These principles, continually practiced in them had so saturated its atmosphere as to have become directing elements in the formation of personal character. None could escape their benign, protective, strengthening touch. They entered into the public as well as the domestic life of its people, accompanying them

wherever they went and lingering with them to the last. Whence it followed that the most valuable legacy of the Pilgrim Fathers to their children was the three-fold one of the Bible, the Common School and the Town Meeting. Without these foundation stones, our Republic would not have survived to witness its own Centennial. No wonder is it, therefore, that the places in which this legacy first found a home should have always exerted a mysterious, attractive power over the hearts of their children. They can not stray beyond its reach. That power and the reverence which accompanies it should never be allowed to expire. And, because it is both a memory of past virtues, and a hope of their continuing practice, there is cause for exultation in the fact that the uplifting influence of this love of Home, as a generator of patriotism, is so meritoriously illustrated in the example of those Colonial families who still retain their roots in the soil of New England, or annually observe a Home-returning Thanksgiving Day or Home-coming-week.

If I have dwelt with such emphasis upon the high mission of historical societies in our country to preserve those ideals of government known as the original American spirit, it is because I see daily evidences that European civilization has not proved itself capable of supplying its own betterments, in either civil liberty, or even in the industrial arts; that it has not yet freed itself from the trammels and duplicity of mediaeval diplomacy; that nations still live by the practice of dissimulation and mutual distrust, and turn away with cowardly insincerity from opportunities to lessen war and to

cultivate peace; and finally that even the Hague convention constitutes only a rope of sand by which none feel themselves to be seriously bound. Moreover, these governments have proved to be, to their own subjects, only "broken cisterns that can hold no water," with the ghost of internal revolution constantly rising before them; and that, in sheer despair of finding any remedies at home, they are all turning to make alliances with the United States as the only remaining spirit of civil liberty which can extricate mankind from serfdom to dynasty and territorial rapacity. Whereupon, and, for the first time in our history, kings now condescend to fellowship with plain American citizens, to invite them to their tables, and to solicit from them, as a favor, American ideas of political economy in the modern arts of commerce and the cultivation of domestic industries. These royal heads, like the sheaves in Joseph's dream, all make obeisance to our federal genius in its various developments in commerce and the arts. Are not these potent signs of the high character which the American spirit of government has everywhere won for itself—in China, in Cuba, in Venezuela, and in the Philippines? Are we not its Trustees, and bound to protect and promote it?

It is true that the Sons and Daughters of the American Revolution have organized themselves into a Grand Army for the preservation of the ideals of American history and American nationality. But justice demands that their picket line should always be held by the children of the Old Colony.

It was my privilege to stand beside the cradle of this Society half a century ago. It is my privilege to-day to witness its mature manhood and the long train of its valuable historical acquisitions. This Golden Anniversary marks on the dial of time its greatest Thanksgiving Day. Well have the sons and daughters of the Old Colony supplemented with their own labors the humble beginnings of the Founders. There is still more to be done. Let the good work go on, let the reapers not grow weary, nor cease to gather in the harvest. With faith and good works, they may hope to see a still more glorious Thanksgiving Day when the sunrise of May 4, 1953, shall usher in their centenuary.

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